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**REMARKS BY
U.S. AMBASSADOR DAN MOZENA
AT THE
INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT-2013**

**OPENING SESSION
BANGABANDHU INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE CENTER
DHAKA
MARCH 20, 2013**

The Honorable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina

The Honorable Finance Minister Abul Maal Abdul Muhith

The Honorable Minister for Local Government and Rural Development Syed Ashraful
Islam

The Honorable State Minister for Home Affairs Advocate Shamsul Hoque Tuku

His Excellency the Ambassador of Denmark Svend Olling

Distinguished Conference Delegates from Bangladesh and abroad, colleagues and friends

Democracy is a quite simple concept.

One hundred and fifty years ago American President Abraham Lincoln defined
democracy in the simplest of terms: government of the people, by the people, for the people.

That definition remains valid to this day ...

... government of the people, by the people, for the people is most powerful, most
meaningful, most effective at the local level, where government and the people are in closest
proximity, where government is an elected member of the municipality or union parishad
council, where government may be your next door neighbor.

The Government of Bangladesh has boldly shown the way in strengthening local
governance. In 2009, Bangladesh enacted legislation that strengthened governance at the
municipal and union parishad levels. These new laws enabled these local councils to generate
revenue locally so they could provide services that better meet local needs; the laws also

strengthened women's participation in local governance. Citizens ... "the people" to use Abraham Lincoln's phraseology ... now are empowered to engage directly in local governance and, thus, better ensure effective, transparent and accountable local government.

These 2009 local government laws offered great promise to fundamentally change local governance in Bangladesh. I am proud that America has partnered with Bangladesh to help make that promise reality.

This partnership between America and Bangladesh has already trained the members of over 600 elected local councils.

This partnership between America and Bangladesh has mobilized citizens-in-governance forums to help the elected councils interface with the citizens to better understand local needs and priorities.

This partnership between America and Bangladesh has helped local councils increase revenue generation by 100% to 500%, thus enabling the councils to increase services and undertake small infrastructure projects ... all for the benefit of the people. The councils now regularly consult with the citizens, hold open budget meetings, and include citizens in local standing committees ... all as mandated by the new laws.

This partnership between America and Bangladesh has empowered women by helping them develop the leadership, advocacy and organizational skills needed to make the local councils more representative and more effective in responding to the needs of the community.

Democracy is a simple concept, as I earlier noted, but it is difficult to make reality.

I applaud the Honorable Prime Minister and her government for their creative initiative in strengthening democracy at the local level. I am proud that America has been your partner in helping you realize your vision of strong local governance.

I believe that President Lincoln would be most impressed by the progress that Bangladesh has made in promoting government of the people, by the people, for the people in localities all across this wonderful nation.

In closing, I wish to thank the Municipal Association of Bangladesh and the Bangladesh Union Parishad Forum for organizing this international conference. I believe that you will discover that local government officials from all the countries represented here confront similar

challenges; I am sure that your rich exchanges throughout this conference will yield many fresh, innovative ideas for confronting these challenges.

I wish to thank as well Amb. Olling, the Government of Denmark, and UNDP for joining with us to co-sponsor this conference.

Thank you.

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**As prepared for delivery*